BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY

Being Deaf in the Community

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Question

“Blindness separates us from things but deafness separates us from people”-Helen Keller. Many of us cannot understand, but coming from Helen Keller, who experience blindness and deafness, shows that deafness is the hardest obstacle to overcome in a community. I will be addressing how people who are deaf in the community feel isolated, how they feel in school and how they feel in either a hearing or Deaf community. I will be using *The Experiences of Bilingualism Within the Deaf and the Hearing World: The Views of d/Deaf Young People* (Ford & Kent, 2013), *‘It feels like being Deaf is normal’: an exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people’s identities* (Skelton & Valentine, 2003), and *Epistemology and People Who Are Deaf: Deaf Worldviews, Views of the Deaf World, or My Parents are Hearing* (Miller, 2010) to show how it feels to be a deaf or hard of hearing person in the community. Also, I will be using interviews I’ve conducted with college students who are deaf with cochlear implants that explain how they feel in the community. Finally answering the question, “How does it feel to be a person who is deaf in the community?”

**Background**

There are three things that stand out when I looked at the way that people who are deaf or hard of hearing have to either deal with or feel in their community. Those three things are feeling isolated or alienated, how they feel in their schools and how they feel in either a hearing or Deaf community. Ford & Kent (2013), Skelton & Valentine (2003), and Miller (2010) all did studies on how people who are deaf feel in the hearing and Deaf world and how these people identify themselves.

All of the researchers mentioned somewhere in their research, something about the person who is deaf feeling either isolated or alienated.1 All three research journals show that in some way they feel left out. Miller found that:

“…common experiences are often based on the negative experiences of linguistic/ communicative exclusion from family discussions mealtimes, holiday gatherings, and other events. Such common experiences often bring with them feelings of inferiority…” (Miller, 2010, p.483). 2

Deaf people feel that because they cannot speak as well, they are inferior. They also feel this way because the medical view on deafness is pessimistic. This is because “The ‘medical model’ of deafness defines when compared to their hearing, ‘normal’ peers. The deaf person Deafness is tested and measured against ‘normal’ hearing levels’” (Skelton & Valentine, 2003, p.454-455)2. The deaf people are being isolated everywhere even though “D/deaf people themselves do not all see it in the same way” (Skelton & Valentine, 2003, p. 464). Ford & Kent talk about someone telling people that they are deaf. One of their interviewees said that when people find out that they are deaf, they start talking to them differently even though they were just talking to them normally before (Ford and Kent, 2013, p.43). They feel like ‘normal’ people and do not want to be treated differently.3

School is another place were deaf children feel different than hearing children. Miller and Skelton & Valentine show some of this in their journals. In schools sometimes the children are not allowed to use sign language. Only oral conversation is used as a “system of partial integration into mainstream education” (Skelton and Valentine, 2003, p. 456). This is hard for the students because it might be the only way that they know how to communicate. Because talking is such a big part of school, the children might feel left out. Ford & Kent saw “…that being the only Deaf in the class was a daunting experience” (Ford & Kent, 2013, p.42). Whenever someone is different from the norm of the group they are generally left out. So it would be harder for a deaf student in a mainstream school to make friends because they are different from their peers.

Being in either the Deaf or hearing community is a place where people who are deaf feel stuck in the middle. This is discussed in Skelton & Valentine and Ford & Kent research. They found that, “…being Deaf is part of a linguistic minority” (Skelton & Valentine, 2003, p. 456). This means that deaf people are considered a minority in the hearing world. When they are in the Hearing community, they might feel taken advantage of because they are only deaf person in the discussion. However, when they are part of the Deaf community, they isolate themselves from the Hearing community (Ford and Kent, 2013, p.42). I feel that it is very tough to be a deaf person in the community because you don’t fit into either the Deaf or Hearing community because if you choose one, you are missing out what the other one offers.

**Methods**

To show how it feels to be deaf in the community, I talked to two people at Bloomsburg University. They are both deaf and have cochlear implants. This means that they can hear slightly, because they have a device that is surgically implanted into their head. The device is placed right behind their ear and it to improve hearing. I asked the girls questions about being deaf in the community and how they feel about it. The girls answers were coinciding with the researchers.

**Findings**

To gather my findings, I conducted interviews. I interviewed a girl named Heidi and another named Claudia. Both were asked the same questions on the different feelings they have as a deaf person at Bloomsburg University. 1

Heidi said that she has trouble in crowds because it is hard for her to hear people when it is really loud. I found, from talking to Heidi, how people react to finding out she is deaf. Since, she has cochlear implants and functions like a hearing person, they do not always believe that she is deaf. Most of the time after they realize that she is truly deaf, they think it’s cool. Heidi said to me that when she asks people to repeat themselves, because they are mumbling or not talking clearly, they basically scream at her because they think if they scream she’ll hear them better. However, she told me, that all she needs them to do is speech a little louder and clearer2. This is just like what happened when Ford & Kent did their interviews. She said that she sometimes worries about making friends because she is afraid that they might treat her differently. So she waits on telling people that she is deaf because she doesn’t want to be treated differently.

Claudia told me that a lot of people do not think that she is deaf because the way she speaks. So she always remind them that she is deaf but if someone speaks clearly she can understand them. She has cochlear implants and devices that help her hear. Without them she is completely deaf. She said that she relates better to the hearing community because she’s had bad experiences where most deaf people didn't accept her for who she was and didn't consider her deaf because she could speak. Whereas the hearing community were a lot more acceptable and interested and friendly. Sometimes, when a person has cochlear implants the Deaf community doesn’t accept them because they feel that cochlear implants take away the identity of being deaf. Since, she grew up with people judging her, she is afraid of people treating her differently because she is deaf. Now she always want to make a good impression. So she is not viewed as an awkward deaf person.

Heidi and Claudia do not want to be treated like the outcast in the group. They just want to be treated like anyone else would be. The only difference for Heidi and Claudia is that they need people to speak clearer and not mumble. Other than that they are like anyone else.3

**Conclusion**

Based on the information that I found during my interviews, it shows how someone who is deaf really feels. When Heidi and Claudia both said that they both felt like they were being judged or treated different because of their deafness. This goes along what Kent &Ford, Skelton & Valentine and Miller said about being treated differently. Thus showing that being Deaf or deaf in a community is tough. Also it shows that you should never judge a person because of their ability to hear.

References

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